



AmStaf, Aussie

AmStaf, Boxer



Basset, Dalmatian,
Staffybull,
Wire Fox Terrier



**Best
Friends
Animal
Society**

SAVE THEM ALL™

Testimony of Richard Angelo, Legislative Attorney in support of SB 239

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Richard Angelo and I am an attorney with Best Friends Animal Society and also a resident of the State of Michigan. Best Friends is an animal advocacy organization that works throughout the country to support legislation like SB 239.

Senate Bill 239 is an important piece of legislation because it would put an end to breed based discrimination in the State of Michigan. Breed discriminatory laws are a bad public policy solution for 3 primary reasons. (1) They infringe on all responsible pet dog owners' individual property rights. Any responsible Michigander should be allowed to own and care for any type of dog he or she wants, regardless of how that dog looks. (2) They are completely ineffective at protecting the public. The best ordinances always focus on individual dogs and reckless owners. Irresponsible dog owners of any breed should be held accountable for their actions and those of their animal. (3) They are a complete waste of taxpayer dollars. It would cost almost \$15 million annually if Michigan enacted a statewide law similar to the ones in place in some of its counties and local municipalities.

As an example of the difficulty of enforcement of breed based discriminatory laws, I have included with my written testimony a slide which includes pictures of 16 different dogs. Trying to visually identify which dog in this array of 16 would be difficult for even the most experienced of Animal Shelter employees. However, visual identification of a dog subject to a breed discriminatory law is the exact impossible task that some municipalities are asking their law enforcement officers and animal control staff to go through. Studies have shown that visual breed identification of pit-bull-type dogs by shelter staff and veterinarians was shown to be inconsistent among individuals and an unreliable means of identification. In particular, 50% of dogs labeled as pit bulls lacked DNA breed signatures of breeds commonly classified as pit bulls.

For these reasons, a wide range of respected organizations have all come out against breed based discrimination, including the American Bar Association, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the National Animal Care and Control Association, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the American Kennel Club, and countless others. In addition, according to a nationwide poll conducted by the Luntz Global group, 84% of Americans believe that a responsible pet owner should be permitted to own any breed of dog he or she wants. That's why 20 other states have passed laws similar to SB 239, with Arizona becoming the 20th state earlier this year.

Best Friends Animal Society
5001 Angel Canyon Road
Kanab, UT 84741
bestfriends.org

Best Friends Animal Society – Los Angeles
15321 Brand Blvd
Mission Hills, CA 91345
bestfriends.org/la

Best Friends Animal Society – New York City
contactnyc@bestfriends.org

Best Friends Animal Society – Utah
2005 South 1100 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84106
bestfriends.org/utah



**Best
Friends
Animal
Society**

SAVE THEM ALL

There are approximately 30 municipalities in the State that have some form of breed based discriminatory ordinance, many of which take the form of a ban of certain dogs because of the way they might look. It is vitally important to note that under the provisions of this bill, every local municipality in the state will continue to be permitted to regulate dogs in their communities. In fact, we would encourage our municipal partners to strengthen their current ordinances by increasing penalties for reckless and irresponsible dog owners. Individual dogs and irresponsible owners should be held accountable for their conduct- no excuses and no exceptions. The best laws focus on behavior, both those of the dog and of the owner. Bad owners lead to bad dogs and that puts everyone at risk.

Senate Bill 239 will also provide uniformity in the both the drafting and application of local laws in our state. Currently, there are people who may want to move to a certain area of Michigan, and cannot do so because of the way that their family dogs looks. In some areas, people are potentially breaking the law simply by walking their dog across an imaginary city line, into a city that has a breed discriminatory law in place. SB 239 would remove these problems for responsible dog owners living within our state, without jeopardizing the public safety in any way.

SB 239 is a win-win for Michigan. It will end breed based discrimination throughout the state, enabling responsible pet dog owners to care for whatever type of dog they choose. At the same time, it will help us focus attention on strengthening our current dog laws to make them more effective at protecting the public. We all want safe and humane communities in Michigan, for our residents and our pets. For all these reasons, Best Friends and I urge you to vote yes on Senate Bill 239. Thank you for your time and consideration this afternoon, and with that, I am open to any questions you may have.

Best Friends Animal Society
5001 Angel Canyon Road
Kanab, UT 84741
bestfriends.org

Best Friends Animal Society – Los Angeles
15321 Brand Blvd.
Mission Hills, CA 91345
bestfriends.org/la

Best Friends Animal Society –
New York City
contactnyc@bestfriends.org

Best Friends Animal Society – Utah
2005 South 1100 East
Salt Lake City, UT 84106
bestfriends.org/utah